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ABSTRACT

A teaching consultation service for college instructors offered at Indiana University--Northwest is described using a hypothetical teaching situation. The service is designed to allow the faculty member a comprehensive and in-depth look at his classroom instruction. It is a voluntary, individualized, and confidential service. The teaching consultant works with the instructor to collect information on classroom performance. Review and discussion of the information provides the instructor with insights into his teaching which may assist him in making improvements. The teaching consultation process includes an assessment of teaching, improvement efforts, and a final review. The process begins with a personal interview followed by classroom observation, videotaping of classes, obtaining student opinions through administration of a questionnaire, and completion of the questionnaire by the instructor himself. After the instructor determines where to attempt improvements in his teaching, the consultant and instructor work collaboratively to design and test ideas or strategies. Near the end of the semester, the instructor and consultant recollect information about his teaching to assess his progress and to determine whether additional improvement efforts are needed. (SW)

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A TEACHING CONSULTATION SERVICE FOR COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS

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For nearly three thousand years, the dictum "Know Thyself" has been a precept in academia. The faculty member has indeed long sought means for looking at his teaching self - for avoiding the "unexamined life" which Socrates would have judged, by implication, as unlived. On the university campus, seeking illumination on one's teaching seems to be a less than easily satisfied endeavor. The college instructor often has neither the time, the training, nor the resources to assess his own classroom instruction.

The Teaching Consultation Process[1] is designed to allow the faculty member a comprehensive and in-depth look at his classroom instruction. Through this voluntary, individualized, and confidential service, the instructor works with a teaching consultant to collect a variety of information on his classroom performance. Review and discussion of such information provides the instructor with the kinds of insights into his teaching which can assist him in making improvements.

The teaching consultation process includes an assessment of teaching, improvement efforts, and a final review. A narrative of my work as teaching consultant to Dr. Case, a hypothetical faculty member, should give the reader

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an overview of the service and what it entails.

Assessment of Teaching

Professor Case and I begin our work together with a personal interview. The interview allows Dr. Case to talk about his teaching in depth and helps me to learn as much as possible about the course we shall deal with and his teaching of it. Our discussion touches on what he hopes students will learn; what particular methods and activities he will use; how he plans to assess student learning; what he perceives to be his teaching strengths and problems; and what some of his values, attitudes, and assumptions about teaching and learning are.

Dr. Case then invites me to one or more of his classes to observe classroom instruction and review it with him. If he so desires, he also can invite a teaching colleague to visit one of his classes. (An overview of procedures and samples of colleague observation forms are available from the Teaching Effectiveness Program.)

Following the observation, Dr. Case and I choose one or more of his classes to videotape. The video of his teaching allows both of us to observe and analyze class activities in detail later. Depending upon Dr. Case's concerns, we might focus on such points as his skills as a discussion leader, the attentiveness of the students, the organization and clarity of his lectures, the kinds of questions he asks, or the way he responds to student questions.

During the fourth or fifth week of classes we ask for student opinions through a Teaching Analysis By Students (TABS) questionnaire.[2] The results provide us with information about the extent to which students think Dr. Case's performance on a variety of teaching skills is satisfactory or in need of improvement. Additionally a section of the questionnaire responses

provides us with valuable information about the students' learning styles, attitude toward the subject, time and effort put into the course, course expectations, etc.

Finally, while students fill out the TABS questionnaire, Dr. Case assesses his own teaching by completing the questionnaire himself. Self-assessment allows him to indicate areas which he feels are teaching strengths as well as areas he is concerned about. Comparisons of his self-assessment and students' responses enable him to determine where he and the students agree or disagree in appraising the classroom instruction.

After the questionnaire responses have been processed, Dr. Case reviews the questionnaire results and the videotape. We then meet to discuss the information collected, to identify teaching strengths and possible areas for improvement, and to decide where to focus our efforts during the remainder of the semester. In total, Dr. Case's "assessment" requires three to five hours of his time and twenty minutes of his students' class time, and is completed within three weeks.

Improvement Efforts

After Dr. Case determines where to attempt improvements in his teaching, we begin to work collaboratively to design and try out some ideas or strategies. Since suggestions for improvement are designed to fit each instructor's particular teaching situation and individual teaching style, activities vary widely from one instructor to another. For example, if we are working on lecturing skills, Dr. Case might read some articles on improving lectures, and ask me to observe or videotape additional lecture classes and review them with him. He might also ask for additional comments from students either verbally or through a short personally designed questionnaire. Time invested in improvement efforts varies among faculty, but

usually the instructor spends from five to fifteen hours on the program. In this comparatively brief time, Dr. Case has gathered information on his teaching through videotape, student responses, self-assessment, classroom observation, and the viewpoint of an outside observer, the consultant.

Final Review

Near the end of the semester, Dr. Case and I re-collect information about his teaching which will allow him to look at and assess his progress and to determine whether or not additional improvement efforts are needed. Typically, I observe at least one class session and videotape another sample of instruction. This affords Dr. Case an opportunity to study recent classroom interactions, compare them to what was recorded early in the semester, and look for changes in his teaching. Students complete a short version of the TABS questionnaire, which focuses on areas where Dr. Case has attempted to develop or still feels concern. Students indicate both the extent to which they have seen improvement in his teaching and the extent to which they think improvement is still needed. Finally, Dr. Case re-appraises his own teaching by completing the short version of TABS. The self-assessment allows him to express his perceptions of change, indicate where he thinks he still needs improvements, and compare his perceptions with those of his students. After all the information is collected Dr. Case and I meet to review the findings, reassess his teaching strengths and concerns, and determine areas where he should or would like to continue to work. At the semester's end I prepare a written report of Dr. Case's improvement efforts, if specifically requested. The report is submitted to Dr. Case alone.

At present, the Teaching Effectiveness Program has provided individual consultation to thirteen full-time IU Northwest faculty from a variety of divisions, departments, and academic ranks. Additionally I am working on

the IU Bloomington, IU Indianapolis, IU East, and IU Southeast campuses, with faculty and staff who are interested in or already trying out aspects and modifications of the process.

It certainly must be recognized that the teaching consultation service is not the panacea for all the problems that beset faculty in their teaching lives, nor can it possibly appeal to all. It does appear, however, to be one way the faculty member can begin to achieve greater awareness of his attitudes, values, and style as teacher. It aids him in reflecting on and exploring aspects of his teaching self that he did not know before, and in making decisions about his teaching life that will be helpful to him, and ultimately, to his students. Thomas Carlyle wisely observed:

> The impossibility of that precept "Know
> Thyself;"
> till it be translated into this partially possible
> one,
> "Know what thou canst work at."

For additional information on the teaching consultation process, faculty should contact: Mary Deane Sorcinelli, Teaching Effectiveness Program, Park View 206, IU Northwest, Gary, 980-6848. If there is no answer, leave a message at 980-6707.

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[1]The teaching consultation process represents an adaptation of the service developed at the Clinic to Improve University Teaching, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

[2]The Teaching Analysis By Students questionnaire includes statements describing a variety of teaching skills and behaviors considered significant and applicable across disciplines, teaching modes, and contexts. Developed from research in college teaching, the skills and behaviors considered are believed to be related to student learning and to student and faculty perceptions of effective teaching. Significantly, the questionnaire is designed to serve as an information source for the instructor, and is <u>not</u> an evaluation instrument.